**Using Interviews and Surveys for Research**

Interviewing is a great way to learn detailed information from a single individual or small number of individuals. It is very useful when you want to gain expert opinions on the subject or talk to someone knowledgeable about a topic.

**Types of Interviewing:**

Several different types of interviews exist. You should choose one based on what kind of technology you have available to you, the availability of the individual you are interviewing, and how comfortable you feel talking to people.

**Face to Face Interviews:** Face to face interviews are when you sit down and talk with someone. They are beneficial because you can adapt your questioning to the answers of the person you are interviewing. You will need recording equipment for the interview, and it is highly recommended that you bring two recording devices with you in case one fails.

**Phone Interviews:** Phone interviews can be used when you need to interview someone who is geographically far away, who is too busy to meet with you to talk, or who does not want to use Internet technology. You have to purchase a special recording device for use with most phone systems.

**Email Interviews:** Email interviews are less personal than face-to-face or phone interviews, but highly convenient for most individuals. You may not get as much information from someone in an email interview because you are not able to ask follow-up questions or play off the interviewee’s responses. However, email interviews are useful because they are already in a digital format.

**Chat/Messaging Interviews:** It is also possible to interview someone via an instant messaging service such as MSN Messenger, ICQ, or AOL Instant Messenger. These interviews allow you to talk to people at great distances and give you the benefit of adapting your questioning based on the responses you receive. Some people are not fluent at typing, however, so you may not get as lengthy responses from this option.

**Setting up an interview**

When setting up an interview, be sure to be courteous and professional. Explain to the person being interviewed who you are, what you want to talk them about, and what project you are working on. Don’t be discouraged if not everyone you contact is willing to be interviewed.

**Interview do's and dont's**

When conducting interviews…

**Do** be careful of the types of questions you ask. See the “Creating interview questions” section for more information.

**Do** start the interview with some small talk to give both yourself and the person you are interviewing a chance to get comfortable.

**Do** bring redundant recording equipment in case something happens to one of your recording devices.

**Do** state your name, the interviewee’s name and title, occupation, or area of expertise, and date of the interview.

**Do** pay attention to what is being said during the interview and follow up responses that sound interesting.

**Do** come to the interview prepared. You should learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview before the interview takes place so that you can tailor your questions to them.

**Don't** pester or push the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, you should respect that desire.

**Don't** stick to your questions rigidly. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, feel free to ask additional questions about it.

**Don't** allow the person you are interviewing to continually get off topic. If the conversation drifts, ask follow-up questions to redirect the conversation to the subject at hand.

**Creating Interview Questions**

If you are conducting primary research using surveys or interviews, one of the most important things to focus on is creating good questions.

**When creating questions you want to avoid:**

**Closed questions:**

Closed questions are questions that elicit a yes or no response or a one-word answer. If you can ask an open-ended question that allows the interviewee to go into more depth with his/her answers, you will have more to work with when writing your paper. Open-ended questions often begin with “how,” “what,” and “why.” If you must begin with a closed-question, be sure to ask a follow-up question that will allow the interviewee to elaborate more.

Closed question: Is there a parking problem on campus?

Revised question—Closed question with a follow-up question: Is there a parking problem on campus? If the answer is yes, you may follow up with: What seems to be the biggest issue causing this problem? -or- How can this problem be best addressed?

Revised question—Open-ended question: How has the parking situation changed on campus since last year?

**Biased questions**

Biased questions are questions that encourage your participants to respond to the question in a certain way. They may contain biased terminology or are worded in a biased way.

Biased question: Don't you agree that campus parking is a problem?

Revised question: Is parking on campus a problem? (Use a follow-up question if the interviewee answers yes.): What can be done to improve the parking problem on campus?)

**Questions that assume what they ask**

These questions are a type of biased question and lead your participants to agree or respond in a certain way.

Biased question: There are many people who believe that campus parking is a problem. Are you one of them?

Revised question: Do you agree or disagree that campus parking is a problem? (Use a follow-up question): Why?

**Double-barreled questions**

A double-barreled question is a one that has more than one question embedded within it. Participants may answer one but not both, or may disagree with part or all of the question.

Double-barreled question: Do you agree that campus parking is a problem and that the administration should be working diligently on a solution?

Revised question: Is campus parking a problem? (If the participant responds yes): Should the administration be responsible for solving this problem?

**Confusing or wordy questions**

Make sure your questions are not confusing or wordy. Confusing questions will only lead to confused participants, which leads to unreliable answers.

Confusing questions: What do you think about parking? (This is confusing because the question isn't clear about what it is asking--parking in general? The person's ability to park the car? Parking on campus?) Do you believe that the parking situation on campus is problematic or difficult because of the lack of spaces and the walking distances or do you believe that the parking situation on campus is ok? (This question is both very wordy and leads the participant.)

Revised question: What is your opinion of the parking situation on campus?

**Questions that do not relate to what you want to learn**

Be sure that your questions directly relate to what it is you are studying. A good way to do this is to ask someone else to read your questions or even test your survey out on a few people and see if the responses fit what you are looking for.

Unrelated questions: Have you ever encountered problems in the parking garage on campus? Do you like or dislike the bus system?

**Citing an Interview**

Name of who you interviewed. Type of interview. Date of interview.

Purdue, Pete. Personal interview. 1 Dec. 2000.

Purdue, Pete. E-mail interview. 1 Dec. 2000.

Purdue, Pete. Phone interview. 1 Dec. 2000.

**Citing a Survey**

Last, First name of person conducting the survey. “Title of Questionnaire or Survey.” City

survey took place, year. Survey.

Cox, Calarri. “Why do students fail?” Aurora, 2011. Survey.

Borrowed from Owl:

*The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2008. Web. 22 March 2011.